ISSN 0712-7774

$2.25USA $2.75CANADA £1.25UK

CEREBUS

mothers & daughters

32

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MAY

NOTE • FROM • THE PRESIDENT

One of the most important elements for a potential self-publisher to remember is that sincerity cannot be faked successfully in the comic-book field. Further, sincerity is what makes a comic book successful and insincerity is what makes it *not* successful. There is a great temptation for people trying to do self-generated comics for the first time to hedge their bets and start by asking themselves what kind of comic book is *likely* to be successful. Although this is usually done with the best of intentions, it is a world-class mistake. I was guilty of it myself in making *Cerebus* a sword-and-sorcery parody title at first. I had had a certain amount of success in the fanzine and small-press world with selling drawings of various Robert E. Howard characters to the burgeoning Robert E. Howard magazine field and hoped to 'tap into' that market. After three years, I was scraping the bottom of the barrel of the handful of sword-and-sorcery clichés and felt no great urge to go looking for any that Moorcock, deLint, et al. might have bypassed. Once I moved from a field in which I had no interest to fields in which I *was* interested (politics, economics, power, religion, etc.), I began to find my voice. Wendy Pini had had the original *Elfquest* story in mind from a very early age and the difference in involvement and affection for the material was readily apparent between *Elfquest* and *Cerebus* in the late 1970s.

A good recent example is Jeff Smith with *Bone*. The *Bone* characters have existed in Jeff's fevered little brain since before he entered kindergarten. Anyone taking a dispassionate look at the material a little more than two years ago as Jeff prepared to bring his story to the direct market would have offered only the longest of odds of his possibility for survival: and longer odds on any kind of success. Jeff himself admits that as he familiarized himself with the make-up of the direct market, he could see no niche whatsoever for what he was intending to do. And yet, as we have all seen, *Bone* has taken the direct market by storm in a way that only *Elfquest* and the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* have before it. This is a recurring theme in the comic-book world which predates the direct market. While Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster did a great deal of freelance work for DC, their involvement with and affection for *Superman* is the element missing from *Dr. Occult, Slam Bradley* and their other features. Stan Lee has said many times that when he sat down to create the *Fantastic Four,* it was the first time he had written a comic book that he himself would want to read. Whatever may have happened after the fact (around the time that Jack Kirby left for DC: 1971 or slightly earlier), at the seminal moment there was sincerity and that was what sustained Marvel and allowed them to overtake the sleeping DC giant where sincerity existed only intermittently in the 1960s, in *spite* of, never *because* of editorial direction. Last year's new universes fiasco is a perfect case in point. Most of the companies participating invested a majority of their money, editorial energies and promotional efforts in attempting to duplicate and revive Stan Lee's seminal energy thirty years later. The point that they missed (and for which all of them — as well as the distribution and retail communities — are now paying a heavy price) is that the imitation of seminal energy is not, by its very definition, seminal.

Survival of the fittest is a central rule of the direct market. Fittest does not mean strongest, wealthiest, the one with the best marketing department. It means fittest in the sense of most appropriate. While most of the money and attention in the direct market are focussed on 'skyrocket' books, titles which flare brightly and then go out, our real strength lies with books like *Bone,* which start as a glowing ember, which flare into a small campfire and are soon racing across the globe like an unrestrained inferno. The greatest mistake anyone could make at this point (and I'm sure many will) is to start a title whose seminal viewpoint is 'I want to do something *like Bone*.' Any such title is doomed to failure in my view. It is a very difficult point to grasp, but if you really want to make your mark in the comic-book field, you have to figure out what you would most enjoy putting down on the page. I have always enjoyed Rick Veitch's work, but nothing I have seen of his comes close to the energy and enthusiasm I have seen in the advance pages of *Rare Bit Fiends.* I have always enjoyed Steve Bissette's work, but *Tyrant* is a completely unexplored level for him, the book he has been promising himself for ten years or more. It has returned him to his seminal interest in dinosaurs; it is his *thing.*

What is *my* thing, is the question you should ask yourself.

There is probably no other medium of expression in the world that is as time-consuming, relative to its 'consumption time'. It takes a writer-artist, on average, a full week to produce twenty seconds worth of entertainment when he or she is working at peak efficiency. In order to sustain the energy level necessary, the creator's enthusiasm has to be overwhelming. It must be painful for you to be away from the drawing board. Excruciating. An interesting interplay between two characters in yet another 'post-apocalyptic humans versus mutations' story that takes ten pages to set up is not sufficient. You have to be completely and unreservedly enthusiastic about page one, page two, page three, etc. Totally interested. Totally committed.

As *Bone* has proven, when that is the case you need only get the work into circulation by whatever means necessary. Word of mouth will do the rest.

CEREBUS

NO. 182 MAY 1994

DAVE SIM
President

GERHARD
Vice-President

LINDA BERZINS
Typesetting

MOTHERS & DAUGHTERS
a novel

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Flight

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BOOK TWO
(Cerebus 163 to Cerebus 174)
Women

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BOOK THREE
(Cerebus 175 to Cerebus 186)
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CEREBUS IS PUBLISHED MONTHLY BY AARDVARK-VANAHEIM INC. P.O. BOX 1674 STN. C, KITCHENER, ONTARIO, CANADA N2G 4R2

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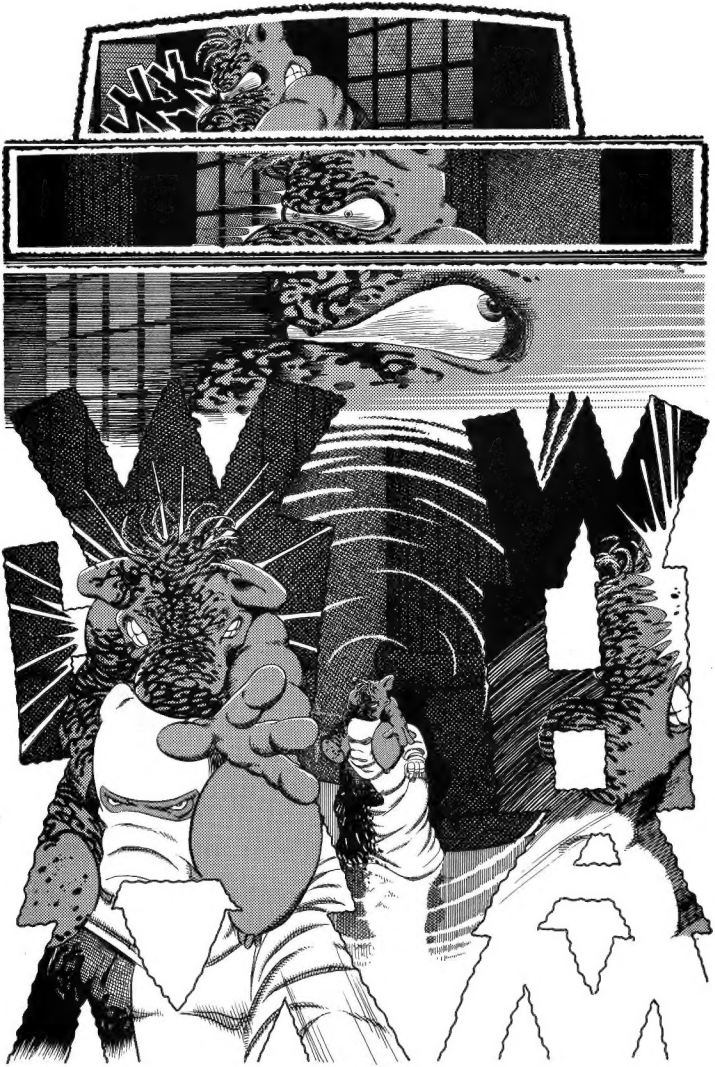

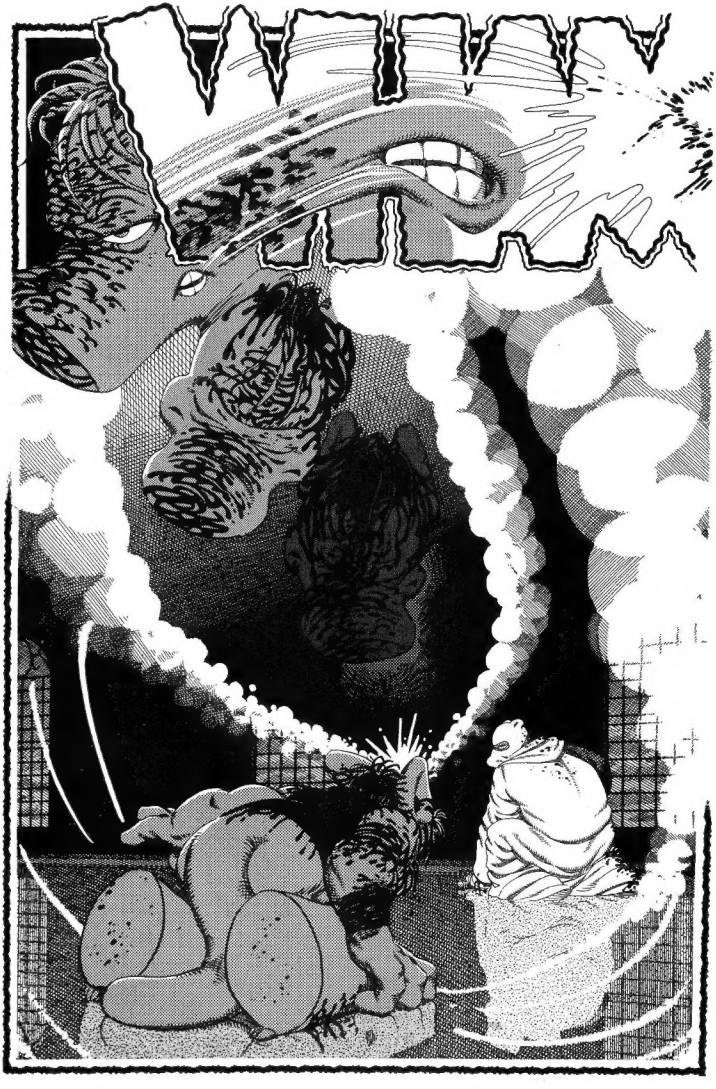

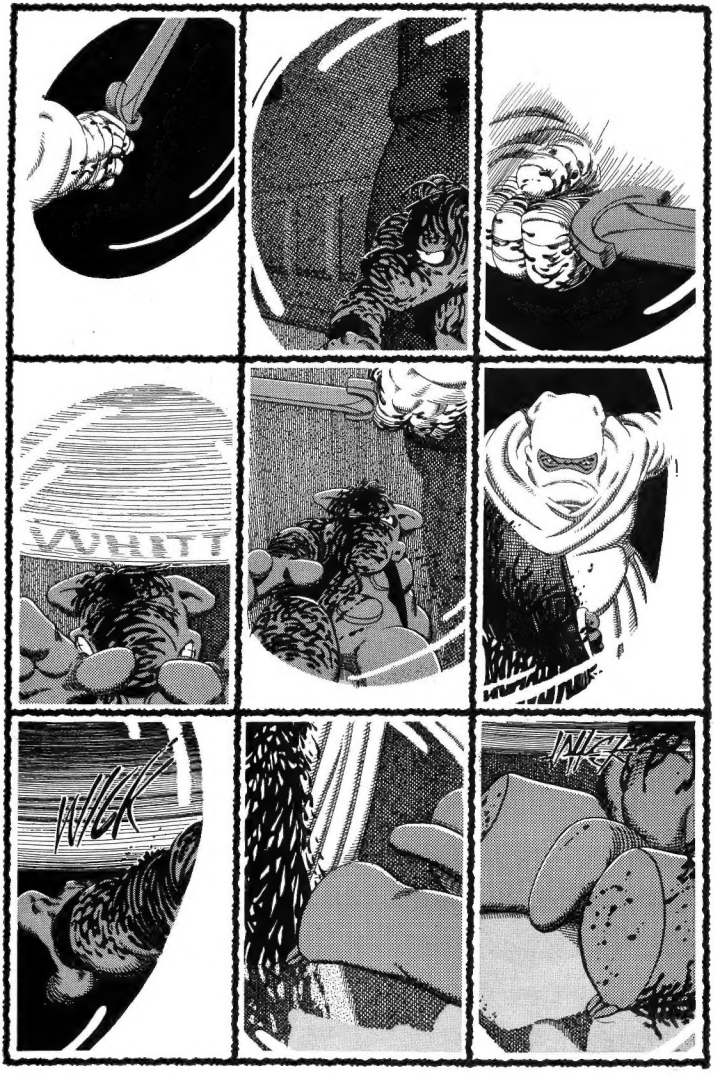
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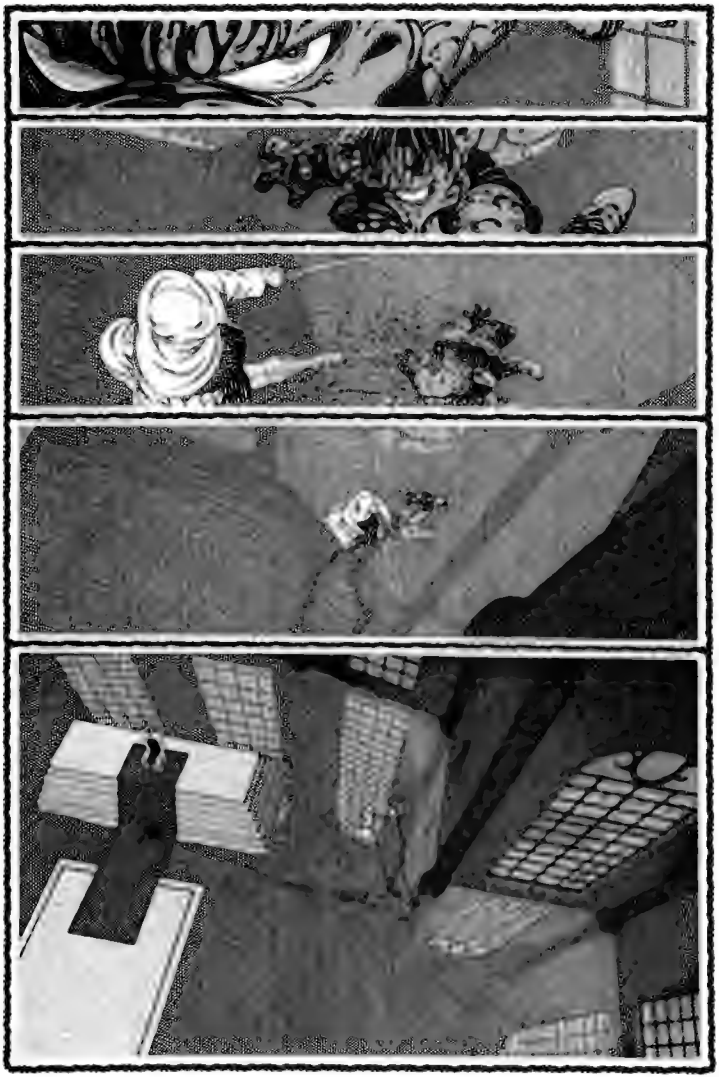


WICK

WICK

THUMP

Viktor Davis was quiet for some time, gazing distractedly into the middle distance. The single word, 'audiences', hung in the air with an aroma about it that was both repulsive and enticing, like an open bottle of cheap whiskey the morning after.

What are you thinking about?

What's wrong?

Tell me what you're thinking.

Talk to me talk to me talk to me

It was a female refrain woven through his life like a discordant crimson thread in the blue and gold cloth of his ordered and solitary existence. It formed no pattern (though it was a female conceit that it did). It grew thick and then thin; it widened, then narrowed. It looped against itself, all irregular curves and arcs and knots and flourishes: this way and that, that way and this.

See? See? I can make a pattern, too! What are you thinking about?

I think I know why men have beards and women don't. I think I know why women want to be men and men don't want to be women.

My girlfriend has a mustache. What are you thinking about?

Viktor was thinking of a rainy spring evening in Oakland, California, scarcely a year before. He was thinking of a convention dinner with all of the guests and organizers, whose attendance had mushroomed out of all sane or manageable proportions. He remembered going outside with Neil Gaiman (several times) for a cigarette break. Never much of a one for small talk, he had taken the opportunity to compliment Neil on his series *Books of Magic* and to focus, particularly, on the recurring question in the story, 'Do you believe in magic, boy?' Viktor offered the opinion that, unless he was mistaken, Neil did not have an answer to the question, relative to himself. Taking another drag of his Viscount 1 and staring Neil directly in his Lou Reed sunglasses, Viktor had asked, 'Do *you* believe in magic, boy?'

After the mandatory Gaimanesque cocking-of-the-head-to-one-side, the sucking-in-of-the-lips-between-the-teeth and the pregnant pause (mouth theatrically agape) which bespoke imminence — Something Significant This Way Comes — came Neil's answer:

'There's . . . *some*thing . . . there.'

He went on at some ellipsis-laden length, but by then Viktor had stopped listening. Neil returned the favour by not listening as Viktor inquired if he felt any qualms about selling the trademark for Death to a multi-national corporation which had the Eye of Horus as its corporate symbol and whose vaults contained the original 16 mm. print of the Zapruder film, particularly in light of its recent market-shaking success with the Death of Superman.

For Neil (it seemed to Viktor) the 'something' was 'there', not 'here', a tapestry of crimson with the gold and blue embroidery of his creativity adorning its edge.

Viktor had heard recently that Neil had another baby on the way.

What are you thinking about?

Saturday morning, Viktor Davis had made himself a pot of coffee from the remnants of a bag of grounds Milou had purchased on her last visit. The bag exhorted Viktor to recycle it. A small folded card, jauntily attached by means of a gold-coloured string, reminded him that he should only buy enough coffee to last him a week; after the expiry date handwritten upon it (now four months past), the coffee would no longer be at its 'peak of freshness' and Viktor would be 'disappointed'. The card itself was a deep, ugly chocolate in colour (one hundred percent red, one hundred percent blue, one hundred percent yellow). The card allowed that Viktor could store the coffee in an 'airtight container in the refrigerator'. It cautioned that Viktor should freeze the coffee only as a 'last resort'. He was informed that it was always best to grind his own beans and that the ideal time to do so was 'just before brewing'. He was advised to use the 'correct grind for his coffee-maker'. Viktor should use 'spring, filtered, or bottled water when possible'. The card was emphatic in directing that the coffee be served 'immediately'. If necessary (if he found himself unable to drink all four cups 'immediately', Viktor inferred), the card told him to store the coffee in a 'thermal carafe' since it would become 'bitter' if left on the burner. The card cooed that Viktor should 'savour the aroma before tasting'. It concluded by cheerfully commanding him to 'come back for more. And think about experimenting . . . ' (not 'to experiment', of

course, but to 'think about experimenting') '. . . either with another type of bean or by creating your own blend' (visions of breakfast-time infidelities behind the back of 'butter pecan' — card-sanctioned serial caffeine polygamy — danced in titillating fashion in the recesses of Viktor's imagination).

Viktor made his coffee with plain tap water. He left it sitting on the burner as he worked and reworked his story.

It tasted very much like coffee.

The bag, even as he wrote these words several days later, lurked somewhere beneath a pizza box and some dirty plates.

What are you thinking about?

Cerebus had just had his right ear severed, an event which had been foreshadowed several times in the preceding years and pages of Viktor's story. It was a new shock, a new surprise. It differed from the revelation that Cerebus was an hermaphrodite or that Elrod had never existed, as these were facts to which the reader was now fully (if somewhat uneasily) adjusted. Viktor had come to view the last half of the twentieth century as the Age of the Self-Sealing Puncture. Even as it became obvious that Nothing Was Certain, a corollary belief had arisen that Everything Must Be Accommodated.

What had taken place behind closed doors? What did they know and when? Which one is lying? Are they both lying?

Give them a suspended sentence and a movie contract, five hundred hours of community service and a made-for-TV mini-series, two years in jail and a book deal. Let them plead insanity.

The larger question, both unasked and unanswered, was: 'Why is this so important? Why is this front-page news?' We have no way of determining what actually happened, so let's have a phone poll. Why? What will a phone poll tell us? Michael Jackson, Anita Hill, William Kennedy Smith, Tonya Harding, Mike Tyson. You, the audience, will decide.

You'll decide that you're not sure.

And then the trial will end.

Next?

'Audiences,' said Viktor Davis, as if the single word explained everything.

What are you thinking about?

A TV reporter covering a comic-book convention for a local television news program had once asked Viktor Davis to explain the popularity of comic books in the Television Age (the way the reporter had said it, both words were proper nouns). Viktor had explained that the free expression of ideas was still possible in the comic-book field, while television, by its nature, had to leech out all meaningful content and ideas before something became suitable for broadcast.

The thirty seconds of coverage consisted, primarily, of a retailer holding up a copy of *Superman* No. 1 and telling how many thousands of dollars it was worth in perfect condition.

What are you thinking about?

Viktor Davis looked down and saw two cookies on a small, flowered plate. He realized he was in the kitchen of his grandparents' house in Stoney Creek, Ontario. A female voice (his mother? his grandmother? his sister?) was telling him that the cookies were for Santa Claus. Moments before, Viktor had been seated in a classroom at Forest Hill Public School, trying to focus his attention on some lesson or other. Evidently a period of a year and several months had elapsed.

What are you thinking about?

Monday morning there had been no mail for him to read, which was unusual. There was, however, a fax from Valerie, a staff artist for the greeting card company which had employed Robert Crumb. Viktor had met her briefly at *Super-City Comics* in Cleveland on the US Tour, the weekend Superman had died (November 22nd). Along with several examples of parthenogenesis and hermaphroditism in the animal kingdom, she had enclosed an excerpt from a book entitled *Unsolved Mysteries* two pages in length (pages 82 — strength and the priestess — and 83 — strength and the empress) which documented 'The Riddle of the Crystal Skull', a five-inch-tall, eleven-and-a-half-pound sculpture carved from a solid piece of quartz crystal, with hand-ground lenses in the eyes and prisms hidden in the base. In a mere nine paragraphs the skull is described as: carrying a terrible legacy that could curse anyone who came in contact with it (misfortune or even death), having the power to heal, teach ancient wisdom or kill

after a mere touch, causing poltergeist-like phenomena, levitating objects, making frightening noises, having the greatest potential for good, being used to tap into the natural electromagnetic field surrounding living things and (once again) to heal. British medium Carole Davis (no relation) says the skull works like a computer, storing information that can be passed on to those who are psychically attuned. Baffled scientists confess (bless me, O Goddess, for I have sinned) that the skull's construction appears to be a feat far beyond the technology and skills of the early people of MesoAmerica. In fact, when a group of scientists studied the skull in California, they confessed (bless me, O Goddess, for I have sinned) that they couldn't duplicate it, even using modern tools. It is believed to be 1,000 years old. It is believed to be 3,600 years old. It is believed to be thousands of years older than that. It is believed to be from Atlantis and was used by ancient priests to peer into the future. Forensic experts reconstructed a face from the skull. It was a young Indian female in her late teens or early twenties. It may have been worked on at least three different times, hundreds of years apart.

It was owned by a woman in Kitchener, Ontario. When Viktor looked up her name in the phone directory, he found that her residence was within a block of the house which had served as the basis for the Young Cerebus story 'The Girl Next Door'. Viktor wrote out a reprint volume order for one copy of *Jaka's Story* and wrote 'comp' across it, filling in the woman's name and address.

What are you thinking about?

Tuesday morning, the elevator in Viktor's apartment building stopped on the fourteenth floor. The on-board computer voice announced 'thirteenth floor'. Viktor remarked on this to the gentleman for whom the elevator had stopped. He said that sometimes it sounded like 'thirteenth floor' and sometimes it sounded like 'fourteenth floor'. The computer voice, he said, couldn't seem to make up its mind.

What are you thinking about?

Did all of this add up to something? Was there an element common to each of these which formed a coherent picture of some kind? John Lennon once said that there were only a few dozen people who truly understood what *the Beatles* were about. Do you think he underestimated or overestimated that number? And what does your answer tell you about yourself? Please write your answer on one side of the paper which was not provided. If the unexamined life is not worth living, why is it that those who examine their lives never seem to be having a good time? Define: 'worth living'. The answer counts for half of your final grade.

What are you thinking about?

Now? Now he was thinking about Alan Moore. A casual observer seeing Alan for the first time might be forgiven for noting his similarity in appearance to an Old Testament prophet. He might be forgiven, as well, for thinking Alan Moore to be an aging hippie, stuck in a decade now as distant from us as the sixties, themselves, were from the Dirty Thirties. More striking than Alan's appearance was Alan's voice, which was deep (no, deeper than that), resonant (no, more resonant than that), ancient (as ancient as the English city which he called home and from which he seldom, if ever, strayed). Viktor Davis was thinking of a comfortable living room in a comfortable house and an evening's conversation now some five (six?) years distant. An evening which made three months in Hawaii seem as shallow as . . . well, three months in Hawaii. Alan Moore is as capable as any in the area of small talk, idle chitchat, the pitter-patter of careless lubrication in the machinery of human interaction, but his self-evident preference is for Larger Issues, all-encompassing and inescapable verities: the *WHEELS* which turned the *Wheels*, which turned the *wheels*, which turned the wheels. Alan, typically, begins talking in a meandering tone, weaving a mental image with words, setting in motion a train of thought. At critical junctures — as he approaches the crux of his argument, the hub of his Wheel du Jour — he suddenly lurches towards you, his eyes widen and they seem to bore twin holes in your own, driving his thoughts deep into the inner recesses of your own awareness.

On this night, this particular night, Alan is holding forth on the subject of stories, histories, lies, myths and legends. His proposition is that they are all permutations of the same thing, that they are all stories and that a story, like energy, can neither be created nor destroyed. A story exists and has a life, in and of itself, a life which is immutable. By way of example, he cites the (then) newly fashionable theory that

dinosaur skeletons had been improperly reassembled, reconstructed. The Tyrannosaurus Rex's leg bones did not fit properly when assembled in the conventional lizard-like 'back-to-front' configuration. A persuasive argument had been made that the legs were actually 'bird-like' (or 'front-to-back') in structure. In Alan's view, even if this new perception prevailed, even if it were, irrefutably, proven to be True (or even 'True' or 'true' or true), the lizard-like Tyrannosaurus Rex would still exist. The image of it, in countless books, movies, paintings and written descriptions would sustain it, sustain the reality of it, sustain its lizard-like 'story' in the face of all efforts in the scientific community to supplant it. The new 'bird-like' Tyrannosaurus Rex was simply another story which had always existed but only awaited being 'told' to achieve a greater substance based on 'belief'.

This was a subtle point which, to Viktor Davis, had the unmistakable stink of Truth about it. He found the implications of this Story (for such it was) far-ranging and compelling in the extreme. It amounted to an alternative view of human history where fact, genuine fact, virtually did not exist. All that existed were stories, lies, myths and legends. It revealed a madness inherent in the scientific world where, for untold generations, educated people had laboured in the relentless search for the indisputably factual, seeking to define the known universe and to fit all elements of it into an orderly system of numbers, ratios and proportions, even as their inescapable 'storyteller' nature, chaotic, fractious and imaginative, was working at cross purposes to their avowed intent. Each theory, each 'story' they created, became real, became True, for a percentage of their community. Following the train of Alan's argument to its logical conclusion, the contest between scientific theories becomes one of a like nature with the contention between Christian and Pagan Europe in the Dark Ages. It is a contest of 'faith' in a 'story' extrapolated from a set of generally accepted 'facts'. Like the Reformation, 'Chaos Theory' (a story which has always existed, which can neither be created nor destroyed) is given voice to. Like the Reformation it brings about a dramatic shift in the prevailing view of 'reality', gathering adherents to it. Like Elder Gods above an Ancient Battlefield, Einstein's elusive 'Unified Theory' and 'Chaos Theory' eye each other, balefully across the tidal ebb and flow of opposing scientific belief systems, even as their adherents, their true believers, attempt to discredit or eradicate the system of belief opposite them. Digits which had been 'crunched' in a computer, 'facts' distilled from repetitious experimentation, infinitesimal measurements, these were raw materials, grist for the scientific mill. Once attached to a 'theory', however; once an overarching implication was inferred, drawn, speculated upon, composed, put forward, given voice to; a 'story' was told which would be perceived as irrefutable for a time, until another 'story' which had always existed was given voice to, thereby creating an opposing belief system. At that moment the earlier 'theory', the earlier 'story', became less certain, clinging to its place in the pantheon of objective reality by the tenuous thread of 'belief'. That which *was* irrefutable — or, more accurately, that which had survived many centuries unscathed in the crucible of Truth (Newton's Laws of Motion, as an example), could be judged factual. Facts were not stories. Facts were story elements.

There was no Church of Newton's Laws of Motion. For sane, rational beings (if we regard ourselves as such), what could make more sense than to use as a foundation for our beliefs that which was irrefutable? In such a church, to whom would we give thanks that 'an object in motion or at rest will remain in motion or at rest, unless acted upon by an outside unbalanced force'? What, specifically, would we be thanking them *for?*

The more Viktor Davis contemplated Alan Moore's 'story' (and he had contemplated it a great deal in the ensuing years), the more implications seemed to adhere to it. What was religion at its essence (*all* religion) but the 'carving in stone' of specific stories? The moon was a fact. The sun was a fact. A rainbow was a fact. In a day and age when these facts were inexplicable, the storyteller filled a fundamental need; fact and speculation were (and are) the raw materials of his craft. Plausibility was (and is) a fundamental requirement of a good story which merged fact and speculation. The urge to turn a story into a fact is fundamental to the non-storyteller. The need to 'know' was synonymous with the need to 'believe'. People would ask Viktor Davis all the time, 'Are you Cerebus?' He would patiently explain that he (Viktor Davis) was a walking, breathing human being; he (Cerebus) was a drawing on paper ('. . . and they call *me* crazy,' Viktor would think to himself on these occasions). A storyteller can create a god who controls the tides, another who rides the sun across the sky, yet another who lives inside every raindrop that ever was or ever will be. All that is required is for the

storyteller to say or to write, 'There is a god who controls the tides.' As Alan Moore has said about *From Hell*, it isn't important to him whether his portrayal of the events surrounding the Jack the Ripper murders are True (or 'True' or 'true' or true). What concerns him is that his portrayal of the events makes a good story. He wants to stir feelings within his audience. He wants to hold their attention. He wants to focus their perceptions, make them laugh, make them cry, make them think. Why? Because that is what a storyteller does. For a storyteller that is enough — more than enough.

But is the story true?

Alan Moore lurches forward, his eyes wide and burning into yours like twin embers in the twilight.

'All stories are true. Every last one of them. All myths, all legends, all fables. If you believe them true, then they are true. If you don't believe them, then all that can be said is that they are true for someone else.'

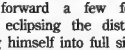
There are probably more stories about Heaven and Hell: more widely differing perceptions, theories and speculations about their respective natures, structures, laws and appearances than there are about any other unverifiable concepts (locations?) in human history.

Neil Gaiman once told Viktor after a visit to Anaheim, California, that he is quite certain that somewhere in the southern hemisphere (possibly the Andes Mountains) there is a small-scale replica of Disneyland, accurate to the most minute detail. All of the buildings and amusements are as black as pitch and, within its confines, every unspeakable horror known to man is carried out on a daily basis. The ebony streets run red with the blood of innocents.

Like any good story which merges fact with speculation, it explains a great deal.

Of course, once the collective mind of Man began to accumulate an ever-wider array of verifiable facts — once those troublesome Greeks introduced logic and sequential reasoning (essentially storytelling which consisted exclusively of verifiable story elements, combining the most satisfying elements of free expression and bricklaying) — the inherent loyalty of the storyteller shifted from religion to science. A good, solid 'why the sun rises in the east and sets in the west' yarn just didn't have the same 'oomph' once Copernicus had had his say. While his story wasn't as interesting, it was more plausible. As any storyteller who sought to merge fact with speculation could tell you, a plausible story beat an implausible story hands down. Everything else was just smoke and mirrors.

The centuries-long process of changing stories (theories) into story elements (verifiable facts) from the vantage point of the storyteller amounted to a 'reverse alchemy': changing gold into lead. The wider the range of facts which needed to be accommodated to make a story plausible, the less room there was for the storyteller to make his story interesting (either to himself or his audience). $E=MC^2$ scores high marks in the plausibility rankings, but, to say the least, it lacks a little something in the poetry department.



Viktor Davis rose from his white chair and stretched. He massaged the muscles in the small of his back, wincing as he did so. He moved forward a few feet, interposing himself, eclipsing the distant white light, throwing himself into full silhouette, casting a shadow much taller than himself across the entire breadth of the stage.

'What do you suppose Leonardo da Vinci might have painted if left entirely to his own devices? What if, instead of a religious picture for the Church or a portrait of an interchangeable wife of some interchangeable nobleman, someone . . . some odd stranger or other . . . had handed him a fat purse full of gold coins and told him to paint what *he* wanted to paint?'

Viktor Davis smiled.

'There's a story idea.'

He lit another cigarette.

'You know, I'm only slightly more comfortable about this than you are,' he said suddenly, turning toward his reader. It wasn't immediately clear whether this was a general observation or if he was referring to something specifically. '*Cerebus* is like that,' he said. 'It's comfortable and then it's uncomfortable. I always know what's up ahead. Last year — the last two years — have been comfortable. The first half of *Mothers & Daughters* was a real crowd-pleaser. It was intended that way: the picking up of old plot threads, the *Sandman* parody. I knew that *Reads* was going to be different. It wasn't safe. As the story changed, I changed. I wasn't writing in the comfortable little space that I've built for myself. I was back out at the edge of . . . whatever you want to call it. The abyss, I guess. Out where the ground is shaky and you never know how secure it's going to be or for how

long. I remember writing my first 'practice swing' at the Chicago Comicon last summer. When I finished it, the thought came into my head: *stick that up your ass if you don't like it,* which made me smile. Then, *stick it up a little further if you do,* which compelled me to laugh uncontrollably for about a half an hour.'

He took another drag from his cigarette.

'There are people who will give you a purse full of gold and tell you to do whatever you want. And then there are people who will give you a handful of silver coins and figure that entitles them to sit on your shoulder and guide your drawing hand the way an air traffic controller guides an airplane. The customer is always right, right? Anyone who doesn't believe that is an asshole. Anyone who doesn't believe that is a prick. Anyone who doesn't believe that is arrogant. Do I think I'm better than you? Huh? Is that it?'

He flicked his cigarette and the ash pinwheeled away from him into the darkness.

'It would never occur to me, sitting at an Eric Clapton concert, to wonder if Eric Clapton thought he was better than me. Eric Clapton is on the stage. I'm in the audience. What more is there to say?'

'For any creativity of any kind, there are as many audiences as there are observers. Audiences. Always plural.'

He took another drag from his cigarette and smiled (or perhaps he didn't. His silhouetted features were indistinct).

'I know. All of this is trying your patience. It's all very interesting to you (well, *some* of you anyway), but what does it have to do with the story? All of that stuff about Alan Moore seemed to be leading up to something.'

Viktor Davis stepped closer to the reader until they were almost touching. The smell of cigarette smoke was an almost visible thing, rising from his clothing. Viktor Davis stepped a couple of paces to his left. The re-emergent light was unexpected and nearly blinding in its intensity.

'Yes. It's leading up to something,' he was saying as he stepped further out of the reader's field of vision. 'Everything is getting much closer together now. You, me. The story.'

The reader could feel the light caress of Viktor Davis' breath tickling the inside of the reader's right ear. The stench of cigarette smoke at such close proximity was nearly overpowering. Viktor Davis was quiet for several seconds and when he spoke it was in a voice which was barely a whisper.

'What are you thinking about?' he asked.

There was the crackling, muffled sound of tobacco leaves catching fire. A concentrated spot of heat flared into existence on the surface of the reader's right cheek: almost, but not quite, painful. And then it was gone. A jet of blue-gray smoke curled into the path of the white light which threw off wave-like beams of light and shadow which varied and shifted in their degrees of darkness, swimming in irregular motions and non-patterns concentrically about the glowing center.

There was the sound of the squeak-squeak-squeak of Viktor Davis' sneakers retreating, fading, vanishing. The white light narrowed, focussed, concentrated, enclosing and confining the reader in a small, slightly elliptical circle of light.

It was very quiet.

AARDVARK COMMENT

P.O. BOX 1674, STATION 'C', KITCHENER, ONTARIO N2G 4R2

Dear Dave,

Well, seeing as I wrote in complaining not too long ago about the lack of pissed-off letters, I thought I should write one when given half a chance. So, here I am, and here we go.

The happy ending to my other letter was a bit premature. Not longer than 2 days after I wrote that letter did I begin to see the error of my optimistic ways. She really started to annoy me. She whined all the time, never let me talk, and all the while went on about superficial and trivial topics, probably because she was very superficial and trivial. I never saw her in person, because she lives in the suburbs and neither of us had our driver's license.

What it all came down to was that I was getting all of the negatives of a relationship, and none of the positives. This brought up a moral dilemma. Continue with the whole thing out of the hopes I might see her in person again so I could get laid, because if I had seen her, I would have. Or I could be nice, and honest, and decent (what all women say they want, but from their actions, you can see they are lying), and tell her how I felt. Hmm, I puzzled. What to do?

They (meaning wise old gurus perched atop mountains dispensing advice like overgrown Pez toys) say that inaction is an action of its own.

I decided not to call her, and hope she got mad at me for not calling and decide not to call me until I called her, and voilà, one instant breakup! Inaction, but an action of its own. Or was I just undecided? Can't remember.

My clever ploy worked well. She called me a week later, however, to tell me she just wanted to be friends. Now, I knew she was bullshittin' so I set up an appointment to get back *Jaka's Story,* which I had loaned her. (She liked it and *Bone,* by the way.) So I got them back and haven't spoken to her since. But, somehow, I am not depressed.

So, technically, I was dumped. And the being dumped doesn't bother me that much, but when I got back my copies of *Jaka's Story,* she was meeting a guy. I think he was my replacement. He is what pissed me off. I was being dumped for a scrawny, pale, obnoxious guy with stunted social growth who looked like he had yet to find an appropriate use for soap! Geez, the guy frightened me. I thought Congress had repealed its anti-inbreeding laws for a moment.

But I got over it on the bus ride home.

So to clear up any misunderstanding, no, I didn't actually love her. Just thought I did for a few days. Then I realized that I didn't love her, I loved the prospect of getting laid. I used her, and feel sorry for it, but she used me too (that story is too long for this letter. Maybe some other time). At least I didn't lead her on and lie to her to get in her pants. I have more class than that. I'm actually a decent guy. Right, Sikmo?

See, Sikmo is nodding. I am so decent. So there. Nah-Nah Nah-Nah Nah!

Well, I've concluded the pissed-off portion of our letter tonight, and I'm entering my goofy stage. You really don't want to see that, so I suppose I ought to go. 'Bye!

Sincerely,

ZOBNEK

I don't look on it as 'using' women, I look on it as 'making use of' women. I don't like being 'used' myself, but I have no problem with being 'made use of'. Horniness is a universal human condition that should not require the complete abdication of future freedom to be alleviated temporarily.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

I've been staring at this damn logic proof for hours now, with no progress, and a friend just rang, which completely blew my concentration, so I'm hoping to clear my head a bit by responding to Dean Esmay's letter in 177, which I passed from doing in that postcard.

I suspect he's right, first off, that the idealisation of victims started with Christianity; while I'm far from an Aristotelian scholar, I think the Greeks would have found the idea incomprehensible. Possibly one could find latent tendencies to the idea in Judaic thought.

Esmay talks at length about the vast influence women have traditionally held in society, but fails to give a single example. Of course, they had influence in the sense that just about anything any given man does, he does to get laid, but that doesn't translate into women having political power necessarily. Jews were extremely influential in the development of Europe, but that didn't stop them from being herded into concentration camps; American culture without influence from blacks would have been unrecognisable, but that didn't stop them from being lynched and having racist legislation passed against them. Not that I'm trying to push the analogy between women and Jews (or blacks) too far; the tensions and dynamics between the sexes are very different than that between the races. It may be "nonsense" for a boy to decide that he's "better and more powerful" than a girl because he's bigger and stronger, but that is also the lines along which most of history has been run.

Would a society almost totally bereft of women have no moral standards against pornography? They're heading that way in some Middle Eastern countries where constant abortion of female foetuses has pushed the male/female ratio totally out of whack, but we have yet to see any of these countries react by liberalising their attitudes towards porn (as a side note here, I know this is callous of me, but I find what is going on in these countries completely fascinating; how long can this go on before it starts becoming valued to have female babies? 10 to 1? 100 to 1? It can't go on *indefinitely*). Also, while this

isn't quite a counterexample, there is absolutely no correlation between countries which have a liberal attitude towards women in the legislature and countries which have strong anti-porn laws . . . in fact, the correlation tends to be in the reverse . . . which at least suggests that there are other forces primarily at work, and this "feminist anti-porn" movement is a smokescreen.

The contradiction he points out between feminine traits as nature vs. nurture, which you also comment on, has not been noticed until recently, because until recently it hasn't been a contradiction. There have always been these two different strands of argument in feminism, as long as there's been feminism; they have tended to be associated with communitarian (i.e., Cirinist) and libertarian (i.e., Kevillist) movements in feminism, but I am not sure whether that is just an historical accident. At any rate, what has happened now is that as these ideas have been filtered into the mainstream, people have picked up on individual pieces of each separate intellectual tradition, while ignoring the coherent whole to which those pieces have individually belonged. The result of this process is a jumbled collection of slogans which don't cohere, because they were derived from mutually inconsistent premises. This has happened with other lines of thought than feminism.

My complaint with your portrayal of the Cirinists is less the way they're written than the way they're drawn . . . when we first saw a Cirinist in battle garb she looked like a jock, whereas later you seem to be portraying them as "fat, ugly dykes", which I think is forcing the point a bit. This is a habit you have that I dislike, and you've done it elsewhere, albeit not with whole groups: the towering, athletic-looking Bishop Powers in C&S Book One, who was capable of verbal duelling as an equal against Weisshaupt, compared to the bloated, fat, hysterical religious bigot Bishop Powers in C&S Book Two, for example. But I won't in general disagree with Esmay that *Cerebus* is great, however.

A fundamental right to a freedom from insult? Let's see how long Mosely-Braun can go without insulting Hatch or Helms (I know I find it difficult, myself) and watch the countersuits fly! It probably only applies to insults from white males, unfortunately.

Finally, I would like to testify that your "fan club" line is a great piece of advice. It hasn't gotten me laid (maybe if I looked a little less like Baskin), but it's saved me an awful lot of money and time. There was some other stuff I wanted to whine about, but I'm getting to the end of the page, so I'll save it to next letter.

Mikel Norwitz
10 Osborn Close
Pownall Road
London E8 4JZ
UK

Well, I think you'd find it hard to disagree that a great motivation for the accumulation of wealth (and the compromise of ideals that usually entails) can be attributed to being a good provider, i.e., providing excessive amounts of material possessions for the wife and kiddies. I think that's an example of what Dean Esmay was talking about. Your average guy is pretty content with a comfortable place to live, beer money, a pizza and a good game on the tube. Once you're up to the three-car garage, designer clothing allowances, Mediterranean cruises, colour-coordinated drapes and furniture, there's usually a chick involved. Now, to me, *that's* power.

The evolution of Bishop Powers was intended to illustrate the 'distillation' effect that these recurring Papal Audience Chamber scenes tend to have. Even someone as well-adjusted as Suenteus Po wasn't immune, by his own admission.

I won't be getting to the why's and wherefore's behind the Cirinists until book four of *Mothers & Daughters*. Stay tuned.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave Sim,

Hello from Orlando. First off, let me just state that I am a huge fan of yours. I am sure you hear that all the time, so I won't bore you to sleep by saying I am your greatest fan. (Let's just take it for granted that I am and leave it at that. heh heh)

Now to the point of the letter. With this letter I also sent a copy of a comic that I have just finished. I gave a few copies to my local comic-book store to pass it along to some others and gain a few critiques. The owner of the store was the one who gave me the idea to write to you for advice and any little knickknack of helpful information you might have for aspiring storytellers-to-be.

We (my writer and I) don't really want to publish this particular comic, but we definitely want the next one published. We are both ready to put in the time necessary to make it in this industry. The one thing we are adamant about, however, is that we want to make it on our own. Without the help of the big people. We want this to be our book.

So my question to you is, how do you gain recognition for yourself with only a limited income? I know that it's a good idea to sit in at conventions, but our jobs are inhibiting us in that respect. If we do find the time, however, we would do it. What do you do when you're there? How do you even get into one?

The next story line we have planned is in a way very much like your own in the aspect that it's going to take 300 issues to complete. You seemed like the man to ask, seeing as how that is also your lucky number.

If you have any mumblings whatsoever, I would take it as divine if you could throw them my way.

Thank you.

A fan who uses you as his inspiration,

William E. Paten
4707 Walden Circle #412
Orlando, FL
USA 32811

P.S. The "Red" Book is #1.
The "Blue" is #2.

Well, as I keep saying in the front of the book, you have to produce a lot of work before you even consider that you know what you're doing. Planning a 300-issue story line is not something I would attempt the second time out of the starting gate. It is, however, up to you.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Mr. Sim (Dave?) and Gerhard,

Godammit, that little furry bastard is great. I don't want to sound like a typical praise letter, but I just wanted to tell you I just started reading *Cerebus* and I'll be here 'til the end.

It all started innocently enough. I'd heard of you, but a guy named McFarlane and a store called

Bedrock City changed that. My first real exposure to Cerebus was in *Spawn*, one of, if not the only Image title I read. I read that story about seven times and found that your writing was som. of the best, right up there with Gaiman, Miller, and Moore. But it was Cerebus that intrigued me. I liked his attitude, his style, and his outlook on life. Apparently one of my friends felt the same way and rushed out and bought a phone book. I read it, too, and loved it as much as our first encounter. So I made a trip to Bedrock, one of the largest stores in Houston, and found the reprints. Needless to say, I didn't have enough money to afford one, so I passed it by in favor of a *Sandman* softcover (I had just started reading that, too. Sort of the great awakening, huh?). But I had learned that you were there just a month or two before. Damn! Just missed ya. I made a point to ask for the reprints for Christmas, and by god, I got them. I received *Cerebus, Jaka's Story,* and *Melmoth.* I devoured them in a couple of days and instantly went back for more. I started receiving *Cerebus* monthly, and also picked up *Cerebus* 0 and *Flight* (signed, too). About a week ago I snagged *High Society,* and am waiting patiently for *Church and State* vols. I and II.

I have yet to read my monthlies (I'm trying to acquire the issues in between *Flight* and where I started, #177, so I'm not completely in the dark), but I've thumbed through them and they look great. Thank you, Dave, for putting out a great comic and sticking with it, too, all the way to the end. If you ever come back to Houston, I'll be first in line.

Sincerely,

Miles Kinghorn
5106 Mimosa Lane
Richmond, TX
USA 77469

P.S. I've just started reading some great comics, and I'd like to know more. I already read *Sandman, Hate, Hellblazer, Sin City, Bone,* and others, but if anyone out there has any recommendations, please write me. I'd love to read some. Oh, and, by the way, I'm only thirteen, but I read things thirty-year-olds haven't heard about. I'm open to all suggestions, so if you like it, no matter what it is or has in it, write me.

P.P.S. Gerhard, you're the greatest.

P.P.P.S. I refuse to read Marvel (exception: Frank Miller).

Miles, it's thirteen-year-olds like you who make me feel that all is not lost. I usually mention books that I'm mad keen on somewhere in the back of letters pages of *Cerebus.* Also, ask the folks at Bedrock City to make suggestions. They've got a great staff there.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

Before I start, let me make two apologies. Firstly, I am sorry to be typing this; for what is quite a personal letter, it seems very impersonal and inappropriate. Writing stern letters of admonition to Tom DeFalco is one thing; writing to someone I regard as *simper, simper* a kind of hero is rather different. Nevertheless, I do so because I know that it is the only way that a letter this long will achieve any kind of coherence — and because at least my spelling will be O.K.

Secondly, my apologies if this letter is long, and incoherent, and boring; it is really the culmination of several letters that I have been meaning to write for a long time. I know you receive prodigious amounts of mail and regard it, to some extent, as an annoyance, but I hope you can appreciate that I only write because I have something to say, because I *need* to say it, not because I think you need to hear it; whatever my faults, I'd like to think that an exaggerated sense of self-importance is not among them.

I guess the first thing I wanted to say was thank you. Thank you for *Cerebus,* thank you for coming to Britain on the tour (we appreciated it, you know — and what good timing, only six months after I discovered *Cerebus!*) and thanks again for the sketch (you too, Ger!). Right now I'm at the end of *Flight,* tentatively awaiting the next trade paperback, to be finally up to date, but buying the monthly anyway for the letters page and previews (I'd never even heard of mini-comics before, and some of them look pretty good). I think *Cerebus* is probably the finest comic I've ever read (all Miller's and Moore's stuff included); I don't know if I always understand it, in fact I'm sure I often don't, and I can just feel all the subtleties passing over my head at high altitude. (Case in point, *Jaka's Story:* allegory? What allegory? I just thought it was a damn fine story.) What amazes me is the sheer strength of your vision — I may not understand it, but I can see it so clearly that I'm just sucked in; *Bone* has a similar effect, though not to the same degree. The best examples, I suppose, are your dream sequences — my favourite being "Odd Transformations" in *Church & State.* They are one of the few times I've seen the experience of dreaming really captured in fiction — the way people appear, disappear and merge, the stream of bizarre images and non-sequiturs has never been so vividly encapsulated. The same goes for the end of *Church & State;* I'll be damned if I can really understand what you're getting at, but I'm nevertheless amazed by the power of the way in which you're trying to say it. I may not comprehend, O Great Dave, but I'm having a lot of fun trying.

Secondly, I want to talk about feminism. Before I read *Cerebus,* I would probably have thought of myself as a male feminist; once a committed socialist, my ideas had been steadily vacillating towards the centre, but this conviction remained. But faced with someone I admired so much who vehemently opposed the ideology, I became worried; surely my hero couldn't *gasp!* be a chauvinist? Well, no, I don't think you are; nor do I any longer see myself as a real feminist. If feminism means nice middle-of-the-road, Suzanne Moore, equal opportunities liberalism, then perhaps I am; if it means unpleasant, female chauvinist tar-brushing, the sort of attitude that means disagreeing with one woman's opinions equals misogyny, then, no, I'm not (the Comment piece entitled "The buggy vocal majority" in this month's *Comics International* is a case in point). But . . . I find your remarks about women's ability to hold government office offensive and not a little absurd (even if what Hillary Clinton did was wrong, what about our Maggie? Would *she* have done that? I think not); more to the point, I think it is unfair to pinpoint the undoubted excesses of contemporary feminism and then ignore the genuine and important gains in women's rights which have been made, at least in this country — for Christ's sake, women didn't even have the *vote* until the 1920s! Consent forms for sex and, to a lesser extent, date rape may be crazy, but I don't

think the same can be truly said of equal opportunities and perhaps sexual harassment. I'd be interested to know your views on abortion — are they the same as Rick's, perhaps? (Personally, I think it's an insoluble problem — the debate is not one of ideas, but of moral absolutes versus individual freedom. I suppose, intellectually, I side with all those crazy fundamentalists, but my heart says otherwise — my spiritual home is the left, however my beliefs change. Compassion over pragmatism, I suppose. Someone once said: "Any man who is not something of a socialist before he is forty has no heart. Any man who is still a socialist after he is forty has no head." You'll have to tell us when you get there.)

Thirdly, and briefly, I wonder if you've seen Lou Bank's positively *venomous* attack on your UKCAC speech in *Comics International* #39; he ridicules it at great length and with much foaming at the mouth. I'd be interested in your response, since, to a layman like myself, he seemed to make some fair points, however acidly.

Finally, and at the risk of boring the hell out of you, I want to tell you a little story about me. Why? Exhibitionism? Well, no, I hope not (both my parents are psychologists, yes really, which I think has made me pretty self-aware — in fact, to the point of narcissism). The thing is, I don't really have anyone to confide in — you being *blush, blush* my *hero* and all, I probably have a puppy-like faith in your omniscience. (Anyway, I went to a therapist for a while and they're full of shit — if ever something was designed to make you self-obsessed and emotionally dependent, it is therapy.) So, here goes (Kleenex at the ready, please): on 31st December 1993, I went to a New Year's party. It was the first time I'd ever done anything on New Year's except watch TV with my parents, which (since I'm 16) says quite a lot about me, don't you think? Anyway, I got drunk, just as I'd intended, and so I did all the things drunk people generally do: staggered, talked too loud, greeted everyone in sight like old friends and probably looked a right tosser. But, hey, I didn't puke and everyone else was either smashed or stoned too, so no big deal, right? Then, however, creepy-crawling out of my subconscious comes *doubt* — you know, "They all hate me, I don't have any friends here, they're all laughing at me, I'm the only one not getting off", etc., etc. So, like you do, I went and lay in the road. Now, I'm not saying I wanted to die — in fact, I don't think I did at all, not really. I remember getting out of the way of at least one car, for a start. I guess I just wanted attention; I was really down and lonely and I wanted some attention. Well, some people found me and dragged me out of the road. Whoopee. I just went back and lay there again. Same happened. So, increasingly distraught, I went somewhere else, somewhere quieter and lay down in the road again. I started to cry, too — God, wasn't I just wallowing in self-pity that night! The point is, a young couple found me and were very worried; they didn't just leave me, and the girl took me to her house and got her mom to give me a hft home. She gave me her phone number and said to call her and tell her if I was O.K. the next day. Well, I did and she was really nice; her name was Sapna and I resolved to send her (and her boyfriend, of course) some chocolates as a thank-you. After all, just after they'd picked me up, a car had shot past and I really don't know if I could have got out of the way of it if I'd still been there, even if I'd wanted to . . . So I send her the chocolates. And then, to my genuine surprise, she phones me again. (I actually hadn't wanted her to — no, really! You see, at least that way she'd just remember me in a sympathetic, tragic light, rather than getting to know me and then *seeing* why I'd want to kill myself.) So I go and meet her, with a couple of her friends, in a pub; it's awkward at first, but we have a really nice time once we've loosened up. I see her again the next week, again with other people; it's not a big success, but we agree to meet again a couple of weeks later, at her suggestion, and now we reach yesterday. Which is really what I want to talk about. (Hang in there, Dave, you're past halfway. Dave? You're still there, right?)

Yesterday. We're planning to go to a nightclub called Stars, in Greenwich; I've never been there. In fact, I've never been to a nightclub. So, I get some money and I get myself some new clothes, for the first time in ages. I'm surprised afterwards, because I actually seem to look pretty O.K. in them — at least, O.K. by *my* standards. I'm feeling good, I'm feeling *hot*, I like this girl and I have an inkling she likes me. (Shit, you can already see this is going to have a tragic ending, can't you? I think it's what Edward Albee called an historical inevitability.) So I go there, but I take a couple of friends, so as not to seem like a complete hanger-on; they're called Will and Trav. When I get there, I find she's brought a friend herself, a girl called Jo, whom I've already met. (Hey! If this gets published and it sounds familiar to anyone, if you know *any* of these people, switch off *now*, folks, and save everyone a lot of embarrassment!) I have a funny feeling I might have a chance with Jo too, just a slim one; I've caught her eyeing me up a couple of times. So, in we go and, wow, it's big, it's loud, it's fucking expensive. We all have a drink or two and gradually the place starts to fill up, people begin to dance, but the later it gets, the more I'm feeling like an outsider. The girls seem to like Will and Trav, and I'm left somewhere on the outskirts. In sheer, drunken desperation (I've been at the Scotch), I leave them and go on to the dance floor and try to "pull" girls at random. They giggle at me with their friends. (Can you blame them?) I go back, to find that Sapna and Trav have paired off, and Will and Jo are getting pretty chummy: the nightmare scenario. So I go, I make my excuses and I go. I have to walk back to Lee, since I haven't any money. It's a long walk. Guess what I do? Yep, I play chicken with the cars again; again, it's half-hearted, but there's more of an edge to it this time. I begin to rely on the driver stopping, not my getting up — they always do. A couple of times they get out and ask to help, but I say I'm O.K. and walk off, fast. It's hopeless, I think, the roads are too well lit, they'll see me every time. So I'm walking along, thinking wouldn't it be good if the road were just a bit darker, and just at that moment I have an Experience: almost supernaturally, a light across the road flickers and dies. Just one. It leaves a little dark patch in the road, right opposite from where I'm standing. It's a sign, I think, it has to be some sort of fucking sign, some sort of choice. I'm still wondering what to do, shivering with anticipation (or it might have been the cold), when it suddenly flickers back to life again thirty seconds later. No cars have passed. I walk

home, pausing only to get thrown over a wall by a drunk called Darren (I know, you can empathise with him by now); "Do you want me to beat you up?" he says, ignoring his girlfriend's pleas and catching me up. Part of me wants to say "Yes!", another wants to run; so I just stand there, dumb, and he grabs me and throws me over the wall. I'm winded and I find later there's mud on my new clothes. He, meanwhile, tires of the gasping figure on the ground and vanishes — when I stand up, he is nowhere to be seen. I go home, watch TV and go to bed. Sapna called me today; she was miffed I hadn't said good-bye to her last night and says I should have stayed. She blithely tells me how Will and Jo got off, as did she and Trav. I'm feeling increasingly like Pud Withers, on a very bad day.

This letter has turned out a lot longer than I anticipated – 2244 words so far, according to the word count. I hope you've made it this far; I know other people's love lives can't be too interesting for the tenth time in one day. I'll probably write again when I get 'current'. And I'll try not to talk such a boring load of old bollocks when I do, O.K.?

Don't die before #300,

Mike

'first thing': Well, thanks. I hope to make it back across the big pond before too much longer.

'secondly': The only view I have on abortion is that half of the population is in favour of it and half the population is against it. Since I would never have to have one myself, that's about the extent of my thinking.

'thirdly': No, I haven't. I consider Mr. Banks an endangered species. He was paid to advance Marvel's viewpoint and now he is paid to advance Dark Horse's. I have no interest in reading 'hired opinions'.

'finally': As someone who has spent his life being a thumb in a world full of fingers, I'm entirely sympathetic. Self-destruction isn't the answer; acceptance is. Find a place where you *do* feel like you fit in and avoid those places where you don't. If you find yourself in a place where you don't fit in, make the best of it or leave. By the time you have looked at a woman in a bar who attracts you, you have gotten full value out of her. Anything beyond that point quickly reaches the point of diminishing returns in the 1990s.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

Sorry about my incoherence, but I just had to write. You see, just a few minutes ago, while driving home from a friend's house something interesting happened.

I was flipping channels, searching for something decent to listen to to keep me awake (it was about three in the morning). On CBC there was an interesting-sounding song playing, so I started half-listening, humming along but not really paying attention to the lyrics. At one part in the song, the words "high society" caught my ear, so I subconsciously started listening to the lyrics, and as the chorus of My Astoria came around, I was startled to complete consciousness. Wow. *Zircus* is actually getting airplay up here in Toronto, on CBC no less.

But wait, it gets better. After the song ended, the radio 'host' came on, blathering on in the mindless pseudo-intellectual way that serious radio announcers (and book reviewers, publishers, English majors, etc.) speak almost instinctively. According to him, because of the title of the song, one of the guys in the band was "obviously from the town of Astoria" in Virginia, or something like that. Obviously.

In any case, I was surprised at how good My Astoria was. I'm not sure if you've heard it yet, but it's a rather strange mixture of almost every musical style ranging from modern "alternative" to 60s rock and roll, to *Beach Boys* style surfer music. And all in about 5 minutes.

Oh yeah, I forgot, my sex-life is non existent, *Pink Floyd* is excellent, and *Mothers & Daughters* is going great and . . . blah, blah, blah (insert fanboy drivel here). Sorry. I couldn't resist.

Michael Schloss
12 Cartwheel Millway,
North York, Ontario
M2L 1P6

★★★★★★★★★★

PERSONAL APPEARANCES 1994

JUNE 4
SAN JOSE, CA
Alternative Press Expo
Contact:
Dan Vado @ (408) 971-8929

JUNE 8
SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH
Night Flight Comics
Cottonwood Mall

JUNE 10
SMALL PRESS EXPO
Ramada Inn
8400 Wisconsin Ave.
Bethesda, MD
Info: (301) 840-0520

JUNE 12–14
BALTIMORE, MD
Diamond Seminar
Baltimore Convention Center

•

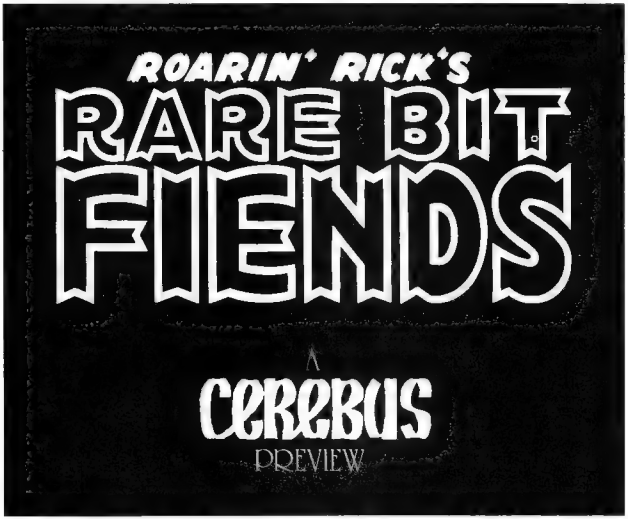
JULY 29–31
DALLAS, TX
DALLAS FANTASY FAIR
Dallas Market Hall

•

SEPTEMBER 24
SASKATOON, SASK.
Tramp's Music & Books

•

OCTOBER 4–19
Aardvarks Over Germany Tour '94
(dates to be announced)
Contact:
Lou Novacheck
WIZARD COMICS
(49) 6371-63591



Howdy, fellow dreamers! This is old Roarin' Rick himself, on hand to introduce the third and final RARE BIT FIENDS preview in the back of *Cerebus*. While I certainly hope the earlier previews (and Dave's kind words!) have given everyone a good idea of what to expect from RARE BIT FIENDS every month, I think this third installment will provide the most interest for long time *Cerebus* fans and connoisseurs of the Cult of Dave

Welcome to the DAVE DREAMS.

Like everybody else in the world, I often dream about my friends and co-workers, as well as people prominent in my field. It doesn't surprise me when I dream regularly about Steve Bissette, Alan Moore and Neil Gaiman because I have either lived close to them, worked on projects with them or schmooze on the phone with them on a regular basis. It makes sense that my unconscious mind would include them in the nightly remix of the events of my life.

But that doesn't explain the DAVE DREAMS, which have been a regular force in RARE BIT FIENDS since the very first dream I recorded in 1991 to begin an experimental 24 hour comic. Over the years, this has kind of perplexed me since Dave and I have never been tight buddies. We did enjoy friendly professional relations during the late 80s until I hitched my KING HELL caboose to the TUNDRA circus train. After that, we didn't talk so much on the phone, and when we did it was like trying to have a light, breezy conversation with a wet aardvark.

So what you have before you are ALL the DAVE DREAMS I've ever drawn into comic strips, beginning with the sketchy ones from the 24 hours RARE BIT FIENDS, through the first three issues of the soon to be self-published Roarin' Rick's RARE BIT FIENDS from KING HELL PRESS. Like all the dream comics I do, they attempt to create an accurate truthful record of my dreamlife, and as such, they MUST mean something, right? The question is: Just who is Dave Sim and why am I dreaming about him all the time?

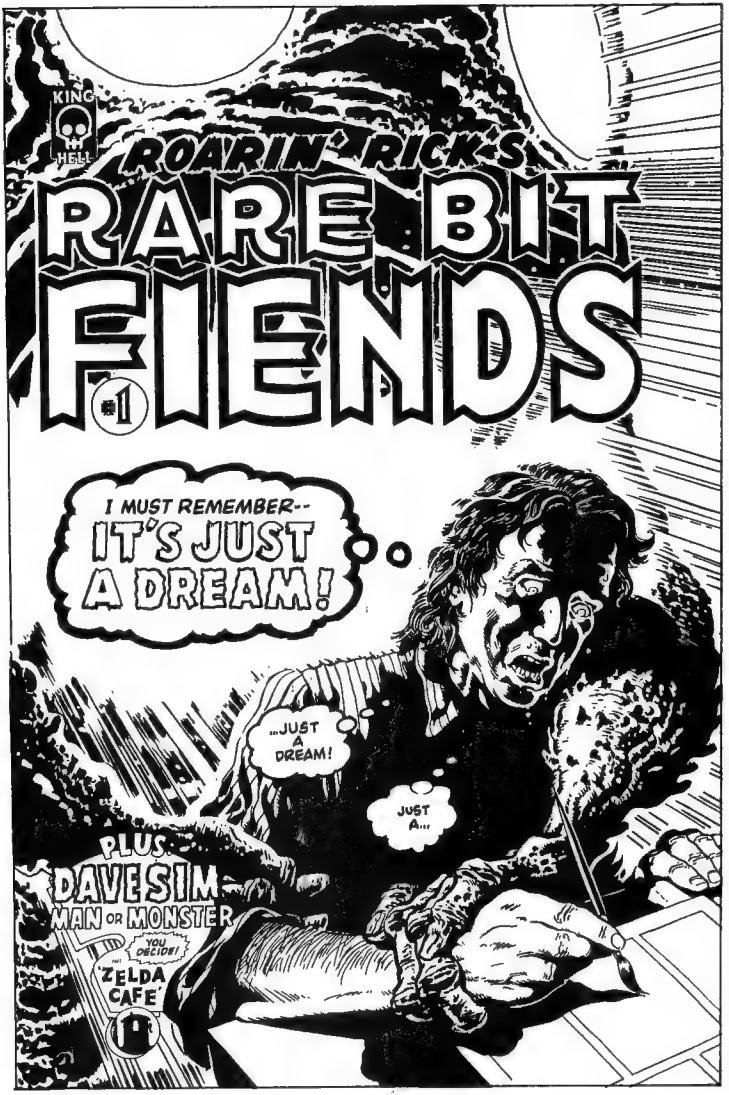
Since dreams are a product of my *unconscious* mind, it occurs to me that my readers might have an easier time answering that question than I! But, in interests of those who are new to how dreams work, I'm going to make a stab at explaining this particular series. Let's begin by saying dreams are composed of symbols which, if you remember back to your high school Lit class, are powerful images that contain many layers of meaning. I suspect any dream we have about someone we know contains unconscious information about that person, but dreams seem to also *choose* certain individuals to play parts that reflect unconscious aspects of ourselves.

In the particular case, I'm quite certain my dreaming mind has chosen Dave Sim to reflect my own potential to take control of my life by (you guessed it!) *self-publishing*, a discipline I have resisted over the years, but which events have brought me back to time and time again. That said, I believe there are further levels of symbolism encoded in this or any other series of dreams. In fact, one of the reasons I'm devoting myself to a project like RARE BIT FIENDS is to see if a large series of dreams provide a glimpse into the deeper rhythms and currents that make up our lives.

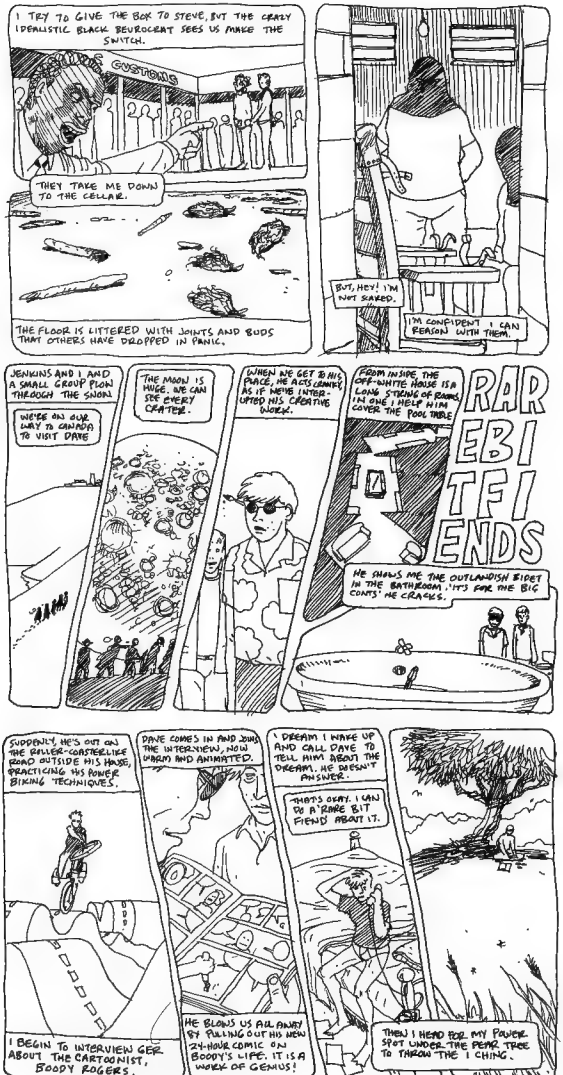
Hope you'll hop on for the ride!

I'm sure Dave will be there when I least expect him!

Rick Veitch

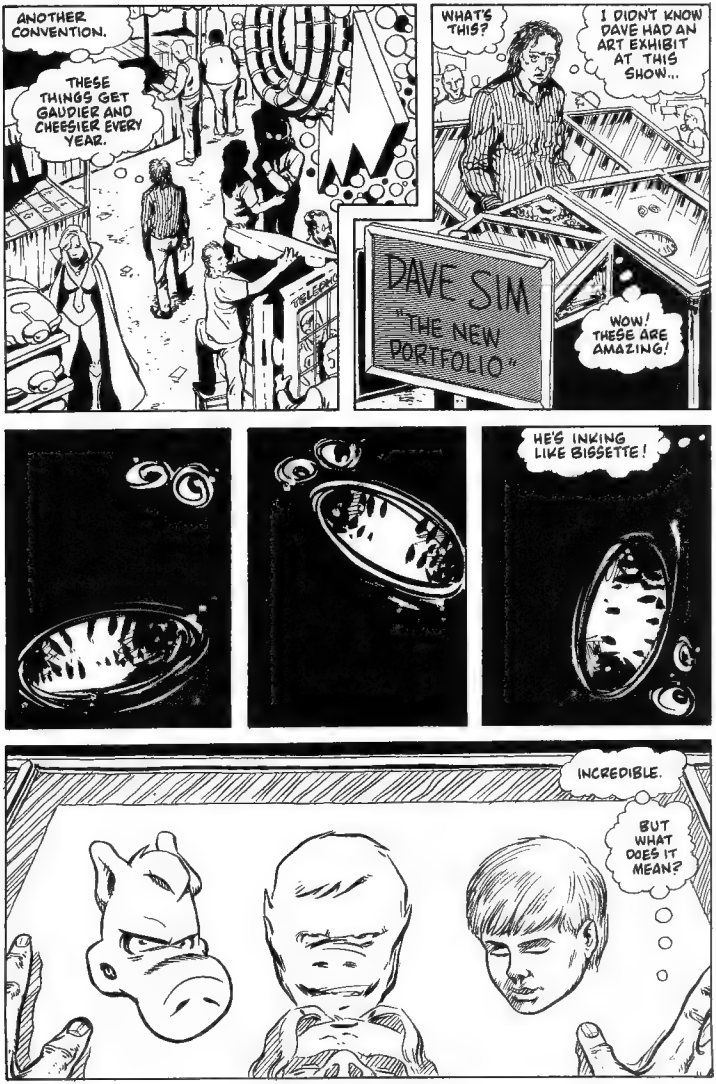

KING HELL
ROARIN' RICK'S
RARE BIT FIENDS
#1
I MUST REMEMBER--
IT'S JUST A DREAM!
...JUST A DREAM!
JUST A...
PLUS...
DAVE SIM
MAN OR MONSTER
YOU DECIDE!
ZELDA CAFE

RARE BIT FIENDS
1:32 PM
SOMEWHERE, OUT ON THE GREAT HIGHWAY...
STEVE AND DAVE, AND ME BEHIND THE WHEEL.
WE'RE GETTING HIGH, I THINK...
THE FOURTH PASSENGER I CAN'T SEEM TO GET A GOOD LOOK AT...
SO, I CALL HIM THE BLANK.
DAVE'S PISSING AND MOANING.
NOTHING MAKES HIM HAPPY.
BUT HE HAS AGREED TO TAKE THIS TRIP WITH US.
I DON'T HAVE THE FAINTEST IDEA WHERE WE'RE GOING.
"MY EGO'S JUST ALONG FOR THE RIDE!" I EXPLAIN.
AT THE BORDER, THE COPS ARE SEARCHING EVERYONE FOR CONTRABAND.
THE BLANK'S CAUGHT HANDING A LID AND GETS BUSTED.
I THINK I'M CLEAN, BUT THEN I REMEMBER THE SILVER STASHBOX IN MY POCKET...
THE ONE WITH THE PICTURE OF ME MY DAD PAINTED IN '58.
UH OH.
IT'S PEPPERED WITH TINY DOPE CRUMBS INSIDE.


I TRY TO GIVE THE BOX TO STEVE, BUT THE CRAZY IDEALISTIC BLACK BEUROCRAT SEES US MAKE THE SWITCH.
CUSTOMS
THEY TAKE ME DOWN TO THE CELLAR.
THE FLOOR IS LITTERED WITH JOINTS AND BUDS THAT OTHERS HAVE DROPPED IN PANIC.
BUT, HEY! I'M NOT SCARED.
I'M CONFIDENT I CAN REASON WITH THEM.
JENKINS AND I AND A SMALL GROUP PLOW THROUGH THE SNOW
WE'RE ON OUR WAY TO CANADA TO VISIT DAVE
THE MOON IS HUGE. WE CAN SEE EVERY CRATER.
WHEN WE GET TO HIS PLACE, HE ACTS GRUMPY AS IF WE'RE INTERRUPTED HIS CREATIVE WORK.
FROM INSIDE, THE OFF-WHITE HOUSE IS A LOVE STRING OF BOOKS. IN ONE I HELP HIM COVER THE POOL TABLE
RAR EBI TFI ENDS
HE SHOWS ME THE OUTLANDISH BIDET IN THE BATHROOM. IT'S FOR THE BIG CONTS. HE CRACKS.
SUDDENLY, HE'S OUT ON THE ROLLER-COASTERLIKE ROAD OUTSIDE HIS HOUSE, PRACTICING HIS POWER BIKING TECHNIQUES.
I BEGIN TO INTERVIEW HIM ABOUT THE CARTOONIST, BOODY ROGERS.
DAVE COMES IN AND JOINS THE INTERVIEW, NOW WARM AND ANIMATED.
HE BLOWS US ALL AWAY BY PULLING OUT HIS NEW 24-HOUR COMIC ON BOODY'S LIFE. IT IS A WORK OF GENIUS!
I DREAM I WAKE UP AND CALL DAVE TO TELL HIM ABOUT THE DREAM. HE DOESN'T ANSWER.
THAT'S OKAY. I CAN DO A REAL BIT FIENDY ABOUT IT.
THEN I HEAD FOR MY POWER SPOT UNDER THE PEAR TREE TO THROW THE I CHING.

HEY, VEITCH! DAVE SENT IN THE CEREBUS JAM PAGE!
MY PANEL'S DONE--WHATCHA GONNA DO ON YOURS?
DOWN WITH LORD JULIUS!
LET'S OPEN THE CURTAIN!
OH NO--THE FACELESS ONES!
AAAIIIEE!
POOT
FRAP
BRAK
HMMM.

FIRST, I'D BETTER FINISH PAINTING THE PARKING LOT.
THE ROAD HOUSE
WHO'S THAT?


ANOTHER CONVENTION.
THESE THINGS GET GAUDIER AND CHEESIER EVERY YEAR.
WHAT'S THIS?
I DIDN'T KNOW DAVE HAD AN ART EXHIBIT AT THIS SHOW...
DAVE SIM
"THE NEW PORTFOLIO"
WOW! THESE ARE AMAZING!
HE'S INKING LIKE BISSETTE!
INCREDIBLE.
BUT WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

HOW'S THE BUSINESS GOING?
NOT TOO BAD--I'VE BEEN ABLE TO GET THINGS PRETTY WELL ORGANIZED SINCE WE MOVED TO THE PLAYGROUND!
COME ON UP. I'LL SHOW YOU THE OFFICE...
THIS IS THE FAX MACHINE--HUH!?
LOOK OUT!
FAX PAPER--ONLY CHANCE!
THANK GOD ITS HOLDING MY WEIGHT!
HUP!
SHOW OFF!
LOOK--ISN'T THAT DAVE SIM OVER THERE?
YEAH--CHUCKLE--I HEAR HE MET A VERY ATTRACTIVE EUROPEAN CARTOONIST AND SHE'S EVEN INTERESTED IN SELF-PUBLISHING!
I THINK HE'S REALLY SERIOUS ABOUT THIS ONE!

AHH... MY OLD HOME TOWN!
EVERYTHING IS SO... FAMILIAR!
CHECK OUT THE SILHOUETTES! THEY'LL LOOK GREAT IN RARE BIT FIENDS!
LET'S SEE WHAT SIM SENT ALONG...
FED EXPo
CEREBUS ASSASINATED!?
BY A CHARACTER FROM ONE OF MY DREAMS?!
I DON'T KNOW WHAT DAVE'S UP TO THIS TIME, BUT I HAVE TO GET THESE PAGES READY FOR EDDIECAMPBELL TO INK!
I'LL DO THE PRODUCTION HERE, AT MY EX-MOTHER-IN-LAW'S HOUSE!
HEY! WHERE DO I PICK UP THE NEXT BUS?
RIGHT AROUND THE CORNER!

SO WHAT DO YOU THINK OF CEREBUS SINCE DAVE DECIDED TO TAKE IT FULL COLOR, RICK?
I DUNNO, GER. IT REMINDS ME OF MY EPIC STUFF IN THE EARLY '80'S.
TOO BRIGHT AND FLAT!
CEREBUS
HEY, MY NEW GIRLFRIEND WANTED A RANGE ROVER!
WHAT COULD I DO? SAY "NO"?
DAVE'S WATCHING ME LIKE A HAWK!
...HIS EYES ARE PICKING ME APART AS IF HE WERE DOING A DRAWING OF ME!
AND I REALLY LIKE RARE BIT FIENDS, RICK!
THANKS, DAVE! SAY... I DIDN'T KNOW YOU WERE A SCULPTOR, TOO!
THIS ONE LOOKS LIKE STEVE BISSETTE AND THIS ONE...
GOOD LORD!
:CHOKE:

AFTER WE HEIST THE GATE RECEIPTS FROM THE NBA PLAYOFFS, WE'LL STASH THE BODY HERE IN GERHARD'S GARAGE.
THIS IS WHERE DAVE AND I HID THE OTHER TWO STIFFS!
THIS LOOKS LIKE MY GARAGE!
BUT THAT'S NOT MY MOTHER.
GERHARD! I TOLD YOU-- NO MORE BODIES BURIED IN THE GARAGE!
ALLRIGHT. WE GO TO PLAN "B".
YES, MA!
GRRR.
I HEAR CHARLES BARKLEY IS PLANNING A HEIST, TOO!
SO WE'LL JUST PLAY THE OLD 'SWITCHAROO' ON HIM!
HE ENDS UP WITH THE BODY. WE GET THE LOOT.
AND IF WE GET CAUGHT?
THEN IT'S THE CONCENTRATION CAMP IN RUSSIA.
WHERE YOUR MUSCLES TURN TO WORMS!

HEY, VEITCH AND BISSETTE--BETTER CHECK OUT WHAT'S GOING ON IN THIS BUNKER!
AWW, DAVE... THE WAR'S OVER!
WE JUST WANT TO GO HOME AND LICK OUR WOUNDS, SIM!
NOT UNTIL YOU FIGURE OUT WHAT TO DO WITH THE APPLE HARVEST!
WE'LL HAVE TO HURRY! THEY'RE BEGINNING TO {UGH!} FERMENT!
IT'S TOO LATE! LOOK AT THE MOLD GROWING ON THE RAFTERS!
IT'S TOXIC. IT CAN DRIVE YOUR MOLECULAR STRUCTURE HAYWIRE!
AND I'VE BEEN DOWN HERE BREATHING THIS STUFF!
DAVE!
YOU'RE DISSOLVING!

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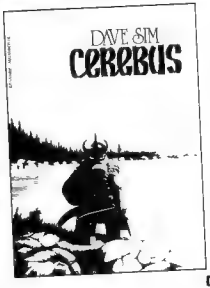
CEREBUS: THE FIRST HALF

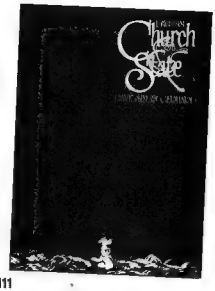


CEREBUS reprints Cerebus 1 to 25
500 pages $25

The Cerebus volume introduces the cast of characters including Elrod the Albino, Red Sophia, Jaka, the Cockroach (later Captain Cockroach with Elrod as Bunky the Albino), Lord Julius, President Weisshaupt and many more.

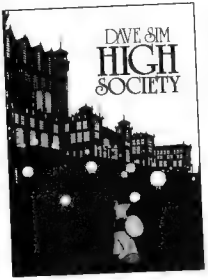
HIGH SOCIETY reprints Cerebus 26 to 50
500 pages $25

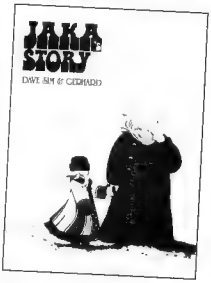
Cerebus gets swept up into the world of high power politics in Iest and runs for Prime Minister. Introduces Astoria, Filgate, Blakely, the Regency Elf, Dirty Fleagle and his brother Dirty Drew McGrew, Duke Leonardi The Roach becomes Moon Roach and Sergeant Preston of the Royal Mounted Iestan police



CHURCH & STATE Vol. I & II reprints Cerebus 52 to 111
1200 pages $30 ea.

One of the longest single stories in the history of comics Manipulated by President Weisshaupt, Cerebus finds himself married and then finds himself as Pope of the Eastern Church! Introduces Mrs. Henrot-Gutch (Cerebus' mother-in-law), Boobah, Bear, Bishop Powers, Bishop Posey, Mick and Keef and many more. The Roach becomes Wolveroach and the Secret Sacred Wars Roach. Also, in volume II, is the Flaming Carrot cross-over



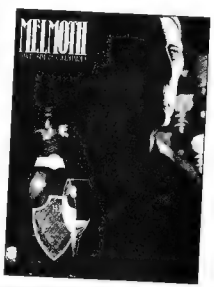


JAKA'S STORY reprints Cerebus 114 to 136
500 pages $25

Cerebus returns to find his life in ruins and ends up as a houseguest of the love of his life, Jaka, and her new husband Rick. Introduces Oscar the poet, Pud, the tavern-owner, and Mrs. Thatcher.

MELMOTH reprints Cerebus 139 to 150
250 pages $17

Cerebus, mistakenly believing that Jaka is dead, takes up residence in Dino's Cafe, clutching Jaka's childhood doll, Missy and his sword The other half of the story is a faithful retelling of the last days of Oscar Wilde The Roach becomes normalroach. Introduces Doris, Dino, Janice, Robbie and Reggie Cameo appearances by Mick and Keef.



and

CEREBUS NUMBER ZERO
(reprinting the 'in-between' stories from Cerebus 51, 112/113 and 137-138) ($2.25)

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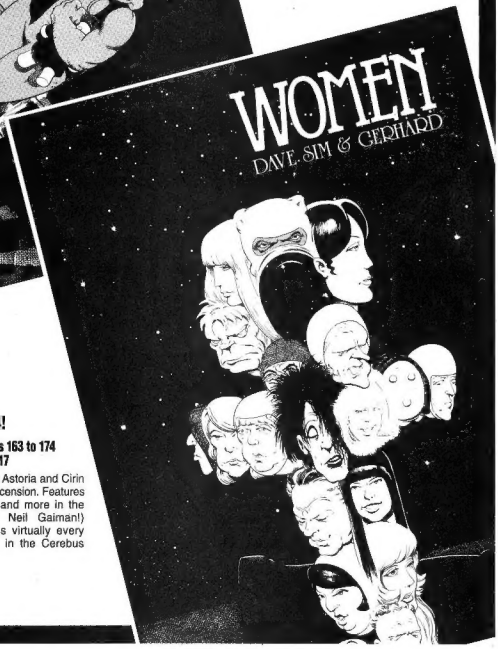
THE SECOND HALF BEGINS HERE

FLIGHT reprints Cerebus 151 to 162
250 pages $17

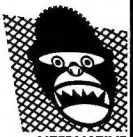
Cerebus explodes into action in the second half of the 300 issue story-line. Trapped in lest, hunted by the Ciriniists, Cerebus battles back. Featuring Punisherroach as well as the unexpected reappearance of many early Cerebus characters, including the first (visual) appearance of Suenteus Po!



NEW IN '94!

WOMEN reprints Cerebus 163 to 174
250 pages $17

The second half continues as Astoria and Cirin contend for the fabled Final Ascension. Features Swoon, Snuff, Sleaze, Sulk and more in the highly-acclaimed (even by Neil Gaiman!) Sandman parody, as well as virtually every female character introduced in the Cerebus storyline to date.



Dear APE exhibitor,

Things are starting to shape up nicely for the first A.P.E. A lot more people than I originally thought have committed early and I think we're going to have a good show.

I have compiled a list of downtown hotels for those of you coming from out of town. These are just the hotels within walking distance of the convention center. They are all kind of pricey, I would recommend starting with the Best Western and calling around a bit for the best rate. Also, ask if the hotel has a weekend rate.

FAIRMONT HOTEL - (Nicest hotel downtown, VERY expensive) (408) 998-1900

HOLIDAY INN - (Right next to the convention center, the ABSOLUTE closest) (408) 998-0400

SAN JOSE HILTON TOWERS - (up the street a ways, a very new hotel, an ugly building) - (408) 287-2100

DE ANZA HOTEL - (About a 7-10 block walk, restored art deco styled hotel recently remodeled, also very pricey) (408) 286-6500

ARENA HOTEL - (Not very close at all, but they have a good weekend rate AND a free breakfast. A good place if you're driving in, but FAR outside of downtown) - (408) 294-6500

BEST WESTERN - (Not too far. I've never been there but how bad can it be?) (408) 298-3500

SAINT CLAIRE HOTEL - (another restored 30's era hotel. On the expensive side. Very close to the convention center) - (408) 295-2000

There you have it. If you have any questions, please feel free to give me a call. Please be advised that there is a HUGE building downtown called the San Jose Convention Center, this is NOT where the APE is being held. Across the street and around the corner from there is a much smaller building which USED to be called the San Jose Convention Center but, since the new building now bares that name, has been renamed PARKSIDE HALL. The sign on the outside still says Convention Center however. Confused? Think about how I feel. As I said, any questions, please call.

Looking forward to meeting you all
Sincerely,

Dan Vado
Slave Labor/APE

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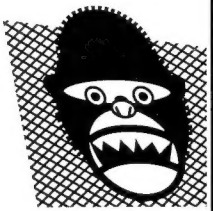
San Jose, CA 95128
1 (800) 866-8929
E MAIL 76527,427@Compuserve.Com or DANSLAVE @ AOL.COM



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Roarin' Rick Veitch -- probably the most overworked cartoonist in the history of his field. At the height of his career he found a way to squeeze even more comics out.

He's Looking for People Who Like to Doze

TODAY HUNDREDS of overworked men and women who never thought they could find more time in their busy schedules are working four, six, even up to eight extra hours a day and sometimes even getting paid for it. They can all thank Roarin' Rick Veitch, the desperately overburdened artist who discovered a way to increase his deadline production by 30%!

Since he often fell asleep at the drawing board anyway, Roarin' Rick reasoned that if he could keep his hands working while his mind slept, he could augment his output tremendously. As it went, he was often in a stupor, even when awake! So, Roarin' Rick created a series of self-hypnotic phrases which he repeated over and over as he bashed-out a 64-pager and nodded off.

RARE BIT FIENDS

When Roarin' Rick awoke, he was astonished to find a complete comic page waiting for him, one he had no conscious recollection of working on! Stranger still, these auto-illustrated artifacts seemed to accurately depict his most secret and personal dreams! With a nod to the revered Winsor McCay, Rick called these mysterious subliminal comics his 'RARE BIT FIENDS' and went on to produce hundreds of them, marveling at their strangely fascinating storylines and the intriguingly symbolic roles his friends and co-workers acted out in them.

SOME OF THE PEOPLE ROARIN' RICK HAS DREAMT ABOUT

Sturdy Steve Bissette: Author/Artist/Self-Publisher of 'TYRANT' and perennial Sixty-Three wage slave, who shares Sweatshop Studio space and atmosphere with Roarin' Rick. "Now I know how the sumbitch really feels about my various personality disorders!"

Dave Sim: Author/Artist/Self-Publisher of 'CEREBUS' and fellow workaholic. "They're telling you to self-publish, stupid."

Affable Al Moore: Heartless boss and 39-year old adolescent. "I don't care if you ARE asleep -- if you're drawing comics, they better be OUR comics!"

Jaunty John Totleben: Collaborator on upcoming 'HELLHEAD' and Sweatshop Stablemate. "Heh -- you should see MY dreams sometime!"

Neil Gaiman: Author of the OTHER comic book about dreams. "I like the part where I'm Uncle Fester. I mean...it was lovely."

Cindy Veitch: Fellow dreamer and long-suffering spouse. "Alright -- who are these BIMBOS you've beeen dreaming about?"

A PLAN TO DO MORE 'RARE BIT FIENDS'

Under threat of impending litigation from his friends and co-workers after they saw themselves in 'RARE BIT FIENDS', Roarin' Rick said: "Bzzsnork...snk. Huh? Oh...yeah. I bet there are people all over the world who might like to read something really weird like this. Why not give these readers the benefit of my years chained to the drawing board -- including all the unconscious complexes I've developed over my career?" Roarin' Rick envisioned a new kind of 'RARE BIT FIENDS', more lavishly executed than his first sketchbook prototypes, distributed to the masses, offering readers a direct link to the most primitive reptilian levels of his mind!

Roarin' Rick's employer was appalled. He couldn't believe the Roarin' One had taken time from his overburdened deadline schedule to work on such foofrah. But when he saw his artist;'s productivity rise from eleven to twelve books a month, even he had to agree. Roarin' Rick had developed a way to spend even more time at the drawing board. Affable Al tried many methods, including hypnotism, drug therapy and electro-shock stimulation, to direct Roarin' Rick's newfound output away from 'RARE BIT FIENDS' and into more Sizzling Sixty-Three Spectaculars, to no avail.

After the Roarin' One's nervous collapse, his psychoanalyst was not surprised that the patient's unconscious mind resisted such attempts to control it, citing studies done on the dreams of concentration camp inmates during the court hearings. And now, armed with a judge's order giving him the right to dream whatever he wants, Roarin' Rick is back at the board, fast asleep, cranking out new and exciting pages of 'RARE BIT FIENDS'. Look for it in 1994 from KING HELL PRESS!

FAMOUS ARTISTS ROARIN' RICK DREAMS ABOUT

Marilyn Monroe
Roy Lichtenstein
I.M. Pei
Brigitte Bardot
Boody Rogers
Don Van Vliet
Sophia Loren
Bob Dylan
Toulouse-Lautrec

ROARIN' RICK'S RARE BIT FIENDS

KING HELL

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